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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating the Historical Development of the Pashto Script

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ABSTRACT

The subject of script is an important topic from the perspective of language and linguistics because the foundation and structure of a language is based on its writing. Writing is what keeps languages alive, and it is through writing that ancient texts of languages are preserved for others. Pashto is also one of those languages in the world that has left behind ancient scripts (likdod). In this way, this language has experienced cuneiform, Kharosthi, and Greek scripts in its historical development, and some historical documents regarding this are also available. However, at the time when the holy religion of Islam came to this land and the Pashtuns became Muslims, the ancient scripts of the Pashto language were changed into a new script, and they left their place for the Arabic script. Since the letters of the Arabic language are few and do not suffice for the sounds of Pashto, various efforts have been made at different times to solve this problem. This article examines those efforts and offers recommendations concerning the shortcomings that Pashto writers still face. In addition, the significance of this research lies in the fact that it identifies the existing problems in Pashto script and provides solutions for them. This topic has been conducted in a descriptive method following the reading and analysis of the decisions made regarding Pashto script in the form of bibliographic research. In The results of this study concludes that the existing problems in Pashto script can be reduced by establishing a general and comprehensive policy, so that Pashto script becomes an internationally accepted writing system.

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Introduction

There is no doubt that writing has emerged much later than language. Language and script are two inseparable phenomena. If there is a language but no script, language cannot survive and develop. It is writing that keeps the language alive and leaves traces for other generations. Similarly, if there is no script, language is incomplete and will only have an oral form.

But writing is not something that was created, created, and enriched in a single day. Writing has also passed through long years of life and journeys. Many languages of the world have gone through different scripts and scripts. Pashto script or script has gone through the stages of cuneiform, Aramaic, Khrushchhi and Greek scripts and after Islam, it adopted the Arabic script.

The Arabic script or alphabet, which has a total of (28) letters, is not capable of covering all the sounds of Pashto, that is, Pashto sounds or phonemes are more and Arabic letters or graphemes (shapes) are less. To make up for this deficiency, in addition to Pashto (or) letters, eight other letters have been added to the alphabet of this language at different times, which has made this process easier to some extent. Until Pashto adopted the Arabic script, it has undergone changes from time to time. Work has been done throughout history for the Pashto script, and letters or shapes have been devised for those phonemes that did not have graphemes, the first of which dates to the time of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni.

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Then Pir Rokhan devised some forms for the sounds of Pashto. After this script, we come to Khushal Khan Khattak script (Zanziari script). This script is Khushal Khan's own invention, his own works and the works of his sons and grandsons are written in this script. During the reign of Amanullah Khan, "Maraka-e-Pashto" was established for the development and strengthening of the Pashto language, which did some work in the direction of Pashto writing, and later the Pashto community has always worked systematically for Pashto literature and writing. In addition, the work of the Peshawar Pashto Academy in Pakhtunkhwa, which has organized seminars on Pashto writing several times, the biggest of which was the three-day seminar at, in which more than a hundred literary scholars, linguists and scholars from all over Pakhtunkhwa participated and made systematic decisions about the script, and since then the Pashto Academy has made efforts in this regard several times. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, the current Pashto alphabet is not capable of fully representing the sounds of Pashto, and even if it is, writers of this language do not pay proper attention to it in their writings.

Problem Statement

Despite being one of the major languages in the region, the Pashto script faces several challenges in digital representation, standardization, and educational dissemination. The Pashto language is written in a modified Arabic script with additional letters to represent Pashto phonemes, but the lack of a unified digital standard across platforms often leads to inconsistencies in writing, printing, and encoding. Moreover, there is a shortage of digital tools, such as keyboards, OCR systems, fonts, and NLP technologies, tailored specifically to the Pashto script. This has hindered its growth in the digital space, limited its use in modern technology, and impacted literacy efforts in Pashto-speaking communities. Additionally, the Pashto script suffers from inconsistencies in orthography, which affects educational materials and media publications.

Importance of the topic

Pashto script, which is an important and serious topic, needs to be studied on a large scale. This topic is of great importance because we are still facing many problems in script. To be more specific, this study will fill a gap in under-documented script evolution of Pashto. Similarly, it will Inform orthographic standardization debates. Likewise, it will support language planning and policy in multilingual contexts. Moreover, it will contribute to broader discourse on script development and literacy in minority languages.

Research Objectives

1- To trace the historical origins of the Pashto script

2- To review the past works on Pashto script

3- To provide suggestions for a standard and unified Pashto script

Research Questions

1- What are the historical stages in the development of Pashto script?

2- How much work has been done so far on Pashto script?

3- What needs to be done for a standard and unified Pashto script?

Literature Review

Based on research, it has been proven that before Islam, Khrushchi and Greek scripts were prevalent in the Pashtun region, examples of which have been found in Wardak (Khwat), Nangarhar (Dronta), and Peshawar (Shahbaz Garhi), but they have not been read correctly yet. (Ulfat,1939)

It is said that the Khrushchi and Greek scripts, which were prevalent in the Pashtun region and ancient Afghanistan before Islam, disappeared with the advent of the holy religion of Islam and gave way to Arabic script, which brought Arabic script (Naskh and Nastaliq) to Afghanistan. The ancient Pashto prose work Tazkira al-Awliya, which was compiled in (612 AH), is difficult to read. (Hussam,1996)

The letters that are written to express movements in the current spelling are not in the Tazkirah al-Awliya script, that is, (h, w, y) are not there to express (zur, zir, pish), which we can see the difference with the current spelling as follows.

The current spelling of the Tazkirah al-Awliya script

م مې د دې پات پاتې ک که ل له پ په ګ ګډ ګود

M me di de paati paati ka kh la la pa pa gud goud

According to previous narrations and current research, the creation or the first attempt to reform the Pashto alphabet dates to the time of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (387-421 AH). This narration was narrated by Qazi Khairullah Nowshari, the author of Khair al-Ghat, in the introduction to this book and later became public. Qazi Khairullah did not narrate this narration nor did he provide a source for the researcher to refer to for further research. (Hotak,2006)

But in the context of these narrations, it is also worth mentioning that Pir Rokhan considers the addition of Pashto letters to the Quranic (Arabic) alphabet to be his own work, with the command and inspiration of God. And Bayazid! And the letters that are used to make the language are for the benefit of mankind. (Roshan,1986)

Dawlat Lawani, a disciple of Bayazid Ormar (Pir Rokhan), has arranged his Pir's words in this way.

افغاني لفظ مشكل و،لوست،كويښ نه شه

ورته وشوه كننده ديارلس حرفونه

The Afghan word was difficult, read it, do not be afraid

The thirteen letters are found more.

From this it seems that Pir Rokhan arranged and explained some of the letters of the Pashto language, which have special sounds, in a special treatise for Pashto sounds from a combination of Arabic and Persian letters. The script of Khairul Bayan, known as Rokhan's script, was adopted in the publications and poetry collections of this movement, and this script was not adopted in other works except by the followers of the Rokhan movement. Although the Pashto language had an alphabet in the past and works were written in it, it may have disappeared with the passage of time, which is why he wrote a several-page treatise on it. Pir Rokhan chose twelve letters, but he calls them thirteen because he used the grapheme (g) in two places.

Rokhan Pir's great opponent, Akhund Darwaza, and his followers have their own Pashto script, which can be called a separate script in its own way, but in some respects, it was like Rokhan's script.

After this script, we come to Khushal Khan Khattak's script (Zanziari script). This script is Khushal Khan Khattak's own invention. His own works and the works of his sons and grandsons are written in this script, and it has been adopted a little more than the Roshan movement. The reason is that Khushal Khan's movement and literary creations are more extensive and widespread than the Roshan movement.

Until the time of Amir Sher Ali Khan, in Afghanistan, where a Pashto script was in use with changes, it is the script that has been adopted in Pashto writings since the Ahmad Shahi era. This script did not have any standard form and was largely dependent on the taste and perception of each writer and poet.

In the 20th century, when the influences of new civilization reached Afghanistan through Siraj-ul-Akhbar and paid the way for Pashto publications, during the enlightened reign of Amir Amanullah Khan, a systematic official effort for Pashto writing was initiated by an association called (Marka-e-Pashto). The duties of this Marka were to formulate the rules of the Pashto language and to write and transcribe textbooks. According to Rafi Sahib, this interview, which set the principles for Pashto writing, did not differ much from the current popular writing, the only difference being that for the sound (ch), the grapheme (h) was given a dot over the other, and it seems that this interview largely adopted the characteristics of the Kandahar dialect. At that time, some of the principles of Pashto writing were published in the Tolo Afghan newspaper. The work on this interview stopped with the end of the Amani period. Later, in (1310) the foundation stone of the Pashto Anjuman was laid in Kandahar and it was inaugurated on the 9th of December (1311) by the speech of Minister Mohammad Gul Khan Momand. (Hashmi.S.M,2016)

The Kandahar Pashto Literary Association merged with the Kabul Literary Association in 1316, and the Pashto Society was formed in 1316, which organized and expanded its work from the previous associations. In 1323, a profound change occurred in the goals and duties of the Pashto Society, and the new duties included: promoting the Pashto language, collecting, and publishing folk literature in the Pashto language, compiling dictionaries and rules of the Pashto language, coining new terms and words as needed, conducting literary and linguistic research, and publishing linguistic and literary works.

From the very beginning, the Pashto Society was seeking to unify the literary tradition, and in order to achieve this goal, it began its first organized effort in 1321, five years after its establishment.

In addition to special meetings, writers and scholars of this society have held large meetings, in which many Pashtun scholars and writers have participated.

Research methodology

To investigate, the Investigating the Historical Development of the Pashto Script, a comprehensive library research methodology will be employed. This approach begins with a systematic search for relevant literature using academic databases such as google, Online websites, and google scholar.

Findings

As a result of scientific and literary discussions on the subject, the following findings are presented.

In Pashto, script is a system of written symbols for different sounds, that is, letters. It can be defined as follows: The representation of a language through symbols or alphabets is called the script of that language. Whenever signs or shapes are used for the sounds of a language, it is called script or script. However, when the writer uses and adheres to the selected signs in writing the words and sentences of the language correctly, it is called spelling. The function of the script is to select a grapheme for a sound, so that spelling is facilitated.

Complete alphabets are those alphabets that completely represent all the sounds and movements of the relevant language. That is, if a writer is given the pronunciation of a word, he can write it, and if a reader is presented with a written word, he can pronounce it.

Just as the internal system of one language and the differences in sounds between dialects are different from the internal system of another language, their spellings are also different, and when the dialects of these languages are closer together through dialects and other social and cultural relations, the more the groundwork for a single language and a single spelling is laid.

First Decision

On the 21st of Joza in 1321, at the request of the Pashto community, (25) writers and scholars of Afghanistan gathered in the Pashto community and decided on (21) controversial cases Disputed Cases Decided Cases. (Yun,2008)

Lip - Lips Lips

Pat - Pa

Second Decision

On 8th 1327 (1948) in Kabul, at the request of the Pashto community, (19) writers and scholars from Far and West Pakhtunkhwa decided on some controversial matters of Pashto script. Some of the cases are as follows. (Hashmi.S.M,2016)

Disputed Forms Decided Forms

can be written without a hymza

Hearing, taking Hearing (without a hymza)

Third Decision

In 1377, when Pashtun writers and scholars from Peshawar and Balochistan came to Kabul on the occasion of Independence Day at the invitation of the Pashtun community, meetings and discussions began on the 5th on the subject of Pashtun script, and after several consecutive meetings, they made decisions on some controversial forms. Some of the accepted forms can be seen here. (Hamkar,2016)

Disputed forms Decided forms

Earth, land, land Earth

Zamri, Mazri, Zamri Zmarri

The implementation of these decisions in the field of writing was implemented to some extent in Afghanistan, because it had some government support, but in Pakhtunkhwa, its implementation was weak due to the free press.

Professor Ziyar does not see these decisions as important and says that in the past, the Pashto community or Pashto dialogue used to be like this: if the number of hands raised by Kandaharians was more, then the Pashto of Kandaharians was accepted, and if the number of hands raised by Nangarharians was more, then theirs was accepted, but we stopped doing this. The difference between our Pashto community and the great man Mohammad Gul Khan Momand was that they wanted to find a standard writing format through a raise of hands and a referendum, and especially Minister Mohammad Gul Khan put the language in the mouths of the people, which is not possible. (Nomiyali,1990)

(Bara Gulya) Conference regarding Pashto Script

After (32) years of the third decision of the Pashto Society, conditions were once again created for practical efforts to create a unified Pashto script. In this regard, on the initiative of the Pashto Academy of the University of Peshawar and on the recommendation of the government of Pakhtunkhwa, a three-day seminar was held in Bara Gulya, Swat on July 10, 1990, in which about a hundred writers and linguists from all over Pakhtunkhwa participated.

Professor Syed Taqwam-ul-Haq Kakakhel, Professor Jahanzeb Niaz, Professor Nasiruddin, Habibullah Rafi, Muntazar Bettani, Abdul Karim Baryalai, Hamish Khalil, Dr. Muhammad Azam Azam, Dr. Khalid Khattak, Professor Afzal Raza and many others were present at the meeting. (Zaghm,1394)

The members of the working committee studied the problems and confusions of Pashto writing in three meetings in a comprehensive manner, considered them all with a cool head and after scientific discussion, read the results and decisions in a large meeting and issued a unanimous decision. We mention the following as an example:

1- Those Arabic and Pashto words that have come to the Pashto language with their own meaning should be written in their Arabic script, such as Qamis, Qisa.

2- We will not write Arabic letters in specific Pashto words, such as Torkham, Tuti.

3- Words that have stress at the end will be written with (e), such as happy

4- Mud is not in Pashto.

5- The indefinite pronoun (y) will be written without it in Northern Pakhtunkhwa and in Afghanistan and South Pakhtunkhwa it will be written as before according to their own writing system.

6- The feminine pronoun (e) will be written with a stress at the end, such as chair, bread, jeeni, etc.

7- The verb (e) will have a hamzah at the end, such as eat, write

and other such parts

In this regard, Chief Investigator Zalmai Hewadmal says that the Bara Gulya decision has some technical difficulties, so in order to further expand its scope of application, a group of expert linguists from Afghanistan, Pakhtunkhwa (Border) and South Pakhtunkhwa (Balochistan) should reconsider it. Mr. Hewadmal did not specify these technical difficulties. (Hotak,2006)

Some personal and individual efforts have also been made regarding the Pashto script, such as the script of Shaheed Khan Abdul Samad Khan, the script of Wazir Mohammad Gul Khan Momand, the script of Qalandar Momand, and others, but the lifespan of these scripts was dependent on the lives of their creators.

Pashto Script Interview: On December 28 and 29, 2016, the Pashto Academy once again organized a two-day seminar to address some issues of Pashto script and orthography, which was attended by up to fifty writers, scholars, linguists, and university professors. The purpose of this meeting was to seek the approval of writers and scholars once again regarding the decisions of Bara Gulya. Some other problems were felt that were consciously or subconsciously repeated by some writers. Therefore, the Academy considered it necessary to organize an interview with its scholars, linguists, and leaders to obtain their opinions on these issues. (Wazir,2018)

After this, in 2008, when the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan was developing the educational curriculum, Kabul University, universities of education, the Academy of Sciences, and members of the educational curriculum and professional individuals discussed some issues They made decisions about it and used it in creating the educational curriculum.

Two-days seminar on Pashto script

Date: May 17-18, 2022

Seminar 's scope: Peshawar Valley (Peshawar, Mardan, Charsadda, Nowshera, Khyber)

Objectives: To collect recommendations on Pashto script, to raise concerns of scholars regarding spelling problems, to officially announce the Pashto Academy's Bara Gulya spelling, and many more.

Around (20) linguists, writers, and researchers presented their research papers in this two-day seminar.

On the second day, several words were presented to the linguists and participants of the meeting and the controversial cases were discussed. The decisions of the seminar were shared with all the participants and their recommendations were also taken.

As always, the Pashto Academy had put all its efforts in this regard regarding Pashto script. In the end, consensus was reached on several words.

Solutions

1- We mentioned earlier that one of the problems with the Pashto language's spelling is that it does not have letters or graphemes for all sounds. This problem is only in independent sounds. All unstressed sounds in Pashto have specific graphemes. Therefore, it is necessary for academic centers to fill this gap, instead of assigning these signs to them using the phonemic alphabet (Latin letters), it is necessary to assign signs like Arabic letters, so that any problem we have in the area of independent sounds can be solved forever.

Mr. Masoom Hotak suggests this view: We should decide on the symbols for Pashto sounds (phonemes), not on pronunciation. For example, we should agree on how to write the long or unpronounced (e). In this regard, it has been decided that two letters should be given one after the other. That is the decision. Now, if a speaker of the language feels the need for the long (e) in any word, he will bring it in this form. In spelling, we decide that the long (e) should be used in the planned word. This is not a correction of spelling, but rather a correction of pronunciation. Correcting pronunciation cannot be done by a decision; rather, a long gradual process and specific linguistic and historical conditions are necessary for it.

Some people talk about changing the spelling, which is a big problem and will create more problems in our society instead of solving one problem.

2- More attention should be paid to the subject of language in educational institutions and curricula, the presence of professionally trained teachers, and the curriculum of Pashto subjects should be prepared in such a way that all the sounds of Pashto are introduced to students from the basic or primary grades, and the selected graphemes should be shown to them, so that the foundation of the writing system is laid in accordance with the first.

3- It is true that the presence of many dialects of this language in comparison to the standard Pashto writing system is another problem, but dialects or accents should be considered a reason for strengthening the scientific capital of the language, not a hindrance to a standard writing process. Dialects should be allowed in some areas where there is agreement and does not increase the difficulty, according to a rule, even if two or more words are from different dialects. So both forms should be accepted, English, which is a major language of the world, has also accepted several forms of many words due to this need. Like (Center, Centre) and (colour) and (color) and hundreds of other words, both forms are used in daily writing and are also recorded in dictionaries.

There is no doubt that solving the problem of spelling as a natural problem will require centuries, but unifying the spelling can be done through a consensus of linguists. If this work is not done soon, it may face serious problems for Pashto.

4- In the field of neologisms (new vocabulary creation), which has been worked on a lot in the past, scholars should pay more attention to this area. Because the need is great, the language is developing, and words are coming from other languages in the political, economic, scientific, and technological fields, so it is necessary to create equivalents in our own language that are easy and acceptable to all. If this is not done, the language's vocabulary will be filled with foreign words. For example, email, team, stadium, referee, maternity hospital, kindergarten, pharmacy, library, patriotism, homepage, sociology, psychology, poll, elections, content, website, etc. If such words are used, our spelling will become more standardized.

Of course, I must say that a scientific community is needed for neologism (new creation), and neologism, arbitrary and individual, has its disadvantages. But if linguists do this and spread these new words through the media and seek the opinion of scholars; I think this would be better than borrowing. “If new words are not created, borrowing will make our language so boring that the result will be nothing but alienation.

Some words that Pashto once borrowed from other languages, but their equivalents have been created in Pashto, it is necessary to use pure Pashto words instead, for example, “Ghabargun” for “reaction”, “Pachun” for “rise”, “Taglarah” for “program” and so on are very beautiful replacement words. Of course, it is not necessary to create a new dictionary for every foreign or non-Pashto word, but if it is created, its meaning should be easy and acceptable to the people. At least the foreign word should be easy and popular. Creating a new dictionary is an urgent and unstoppable need only for several unnecessary words,

because if a foreign word becomes common in the language, it is difficult for a new word to replace it. However, standards should be considered in neologisms, so that words that are so difficult to generalize should not be created. Such names that are not commonly understood and that are even higher than the knowledge of linguists, in my opinion, will harm the language instead of benefiting it. It would be better to use the same foreign words again. Professor Najib Manali's statement on neologisms: "There is also a fear that the hatred of the haters will cause more damage to Pashto than the hatred of the opponents... He then adds: On the other hand, I have spent almost my entire life with books, have learned three or four foreign languages, and do not consider myself deprived of the knowledge of Pashto history and literature. If I pick up an issue of Gorbat magazine and read an interview with Professor Samim or an article by Professor Ziyar, I do not understand even half of it and wonder who this news is for? Mr. Najib Manali considers the creation of new words as the progress of the language, but adds: ... Forcibly making borrowed words that have been adopted by the language into Pashto may or may not be beneficial for the language, but it is an injustice to the speakers of the language.

5- A specific scientific approach should be adopted for loanwords. The language should be completely refined and all its vocabulary should be used in it, because this is not possible, no language is perfect, and some words will inevitably be borrowed from other languages. Arabic, which is the language of the Quran and is endowed with complete eloquence, is still not perfect and some words from other languages have already existed in it, such as “Amen” from Hebrew, “Istbarq, Sundus, Zinjabil…” from Persian and so on, but now with the advent of technology, many English words have also entered it. Similarly, English is also a diverse and rich language, but it contains words from other languages. Therefore, no language is perfect and is influenced by other languages.

In the second way, many words have entered Pashto from English - which is currently the language of science and technology - such as radio, television, mobile, SIM card, computer, Internet, Facebook, etc., for which we do not yet have equivalents, but some words that have equivalents, but still some people use English words instead, such as: problem, quality, special, direct, true, etc., which has also greatly damaged standard spelling. The use of such words that have equivalents should be avoided. Some words from Arabic, Persian, Urdu, or other languages that have entered the Pashto language and are quite common and accepted in the Pashto language. Such as "book or pen", can be left as they are. Also, the singular and plural of such Arabic nouns should be determined according to the grammatical tradition of Pashto. For example, instead of writing the plural of "right or text" as "rights or texts", which is the Arabic form, we write it as "rights or texts". This way, standardization can be relatively simple, easy, and reduces problems.

Conclusion

In addition to previous individual efforts regarding Pashto script; in the second half of the nineteenth century, orientalists on the one hand and new technology (printing) on the other hand unified the Pashto script to some extent; but still the differences remained.

In the second decade of the twentieth century, when Pashto was declared the national language of Afghanistan, official efforts were started at the state level to standardize this language and script. In 1920, the Pashto Council was established to compile the rules and regulations of the Pashto language, and institutions were also established to standardize the script; but the standardization process was not as successful as expected.

Since script is a very big subject; there is a need for in-depth research to establish unity in this fundamental part of the language, which can be done only by professionals and people who are well versed in the language; For the accuracy of the script, people who are familiar with all the dialects of a given language should be involved. This work should be done by scholars, because this is a scientific subject, not a fantasy or a whim.

In this study, past work on Pashto script was reviewed, and solutions and new suggestions were made to solve current problems.

Recommendations

- Pashtun writers and scholars should continue their efforts to improve Pashto script and establish standards for script based on a certain methodology.
- The problem of script is a problem of the entire Pashtun nation and is not limited to writers or the profession of literature, but is related to all sciences and professions. Therefore, any research, compilation or translation done in universities and other academic centers should be reviewed

by a committee. Professors should also give priority to standards in their writings instead of writing in their own dialect.

- The country's press and broadcasting organizations should take a very careful approach in this regard and publish their publications according to a specific set of principles.
- Pashto speakers should create a computer application for the Pashto language that, when a word is written incorrectly and against the standard, will indicate the correct form to the writer, as has been done for many languages of the world.

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